



Closing Announcements (part 2)

Colossians 4:12-18

- 6. Pray for others (like Epaphras)
- 7. Serve with your skills (like Luke)
- 8. Don't love this world (like Demas)
- 9. Serve with your resources (like Nympha)
- 10. Fulfill your ministry (like Archippus)

It is our custom at Rock Valley Bible Church to take picture of our congregation each year. We place magnets on the back of these pictures and hand them out to each of the families in the church. We encourage you to place them on your refrigerator, so that you can remember to pray for those in the congregation. Our text this morning is a bit like a congregational picture of the church in Colossae. Admittedly, it's not a picture of images. Rather, it's a picture with words. Paul describes those who are with him in jail who send their greetings. He also describes those who are in Colossae, having special instructions for them. My message this morning is part two of a message that I began last week. Appropriately, my message is entitled, "Closing Announcements (part 2)." I explained last week how verses 7-18 sound like Paul is closing a worship service, and seeking to make a few announcements for all in the church to hear. I arranged my message last week around the names of the individuals that Paul mentioned in the letter. Each of them have something to teach us about serving Christ.

Last week, we looked at the first five names mentioned. In verses 7 and 8, we learned the lesson of "being a faithful servant" from *Tychicus*. Paul gave him the duty of delivering this letter to those in Colossae, which he was very willing to do. In fact, as you trace this man throughout the New Testament, you find him always willing to whatever it took for the kingdom of God. In verse 9, we learned about *Onesimus*, who teaches us to "do the right thing." He was a runaway slave, who was doing the right thing in returning to his master to make things right with him. In the first half of verse 10, we looked at the life of *Aristarchus*. He taught us to "be willing to suffer." He was Paul's fellow traveler and fellow-prisoner. In the last half of verse 10, we considered the life of *Mark*. The lesson from his life is that we should "never give up." Early in his ministry, he abandoned the apostle Paul, but continued to labor for the Lord, and eventually became useful to Paul and his ministry (2 Tim. 4:11). In verse 11, we learned about *Justus*, who instructs us to "trust the Messiah." Most, if not all, of the Jews in Rome, who heard the message of the gospel of Christ from the lips of Paul rejected it. But, Justus, himself being a Jew, trusted in Jesus as the Messiah. So ought we to do the same.

This morning, we will look at the last five names mentioned by the apostle Paul: Epaphras, Luke, Demas, Nympha, and Archippus. Again, like last time, each of them have a lesson for us to learn in our walk with Christ. [\[1\]](#)

We pick it up in verses 12-13 with Epaphras. Here is what Paul writes about him, "Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis" (Col. 4:12-13). The lesson Epaphras has to teach us is simple:

6. Pray for others (like Epaphras)

Epaphras is mentioned only three times in all the Scripture (twice in Colossians, and once in Philemon). In **Philemon, verse 23**, we find Epaphras sending his greetings to Philemon. We also get the idea that he, too, is imprisoned. He is called, Paul's fellow-prisoner. It may well be the case that Epaphras was in prison for preaching the gospel as Paul had done. They were "fellow prisoners" who were suffering for the same cause. The story of Epaphras probably originates back in Acts 19, verse 10. He's not mentioned in this verse. But this verse describes how Paul was teaching in Ephesus for two years. Many took his teaching and went throughout Asia preaching the gospel to such an extent that we read that "all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). It's our best guess that Epaphras was one of those numbers who heard Paul preach the gospel of Christ and went out to share it.

At some point, we know that Epaphras came to Colossae and told them of the "grace of God in truth" (Col. 1:6). In **Colossians 1:7-8**, Paul writes to those at the church in Colossae, "just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit." When you put together the circumstances, our best guess is that Epaphras was the first to bring the gospel to Colossae and remained there for some time as their pastor. During that time, he developed a huge heart for those in Colossae. But, for some reason, (perhaps because of his preaching activity), he was thrown in prison and sent to Rome, where he met the apostle Paul and told him the entire story about what took place in Colossae.

In **Colossians 4:12**, Paul commends Epaphras to those in Colossae, by bringing out some notable qualities he possessed. First of all, he identifies him as "one of your number." This simply means that Epaphras was from Colossae. We don't know for sure if he was born and raised there, or simply that he had established Colossae as his place of residence. But I would make it my guess that he grew up in Colossae. Paul's phrase to identify him as "one of your number" appears to be a bit more deeply personal than describing him as "one who has lived in Colossae." Colossae was his hometown. Should anyone ask Epaphras, "Where are you from?" He'd quickly be able to respond, "I'm from Colossae." Secondly, Paul also identifies him as "a bondservant of Jesus Christ." This simply means that Epaphras had enslaved

himself to Jesus Christ. Christ was his master. Epaphras was his slave, willing to do whatever work his master called him to do. In this way, he had a kindred spirit with Paul, who often identified himself this way (Romans 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1). These are good qualities of this man. But, the one that stands out most for me is his diligence in prayer.

A few weeks ago, I preached a message on Colossians, chapter 4 and verse 2, in which Paul says, "Devote yourselves to prayer." In that message I sought to press home to you the effort that it takes to devote yourself to such a task. It takes a dedication of time. It takes a heart of perseverance in the difficulty. It takes a spiritual perspective of others. - It takes a genuine love for the objects of your prayer requests. Epaphras had all of these things. He took the time to pray. He continued to pray when it was difficult. He prayed for the most important things. He prayed because of his love for these people.

Look a bit at how Paul describes this man's prayer life. He says that he was "always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers." We can see the devotion of time in his prayers. Paul says that Epaphras is "always" praying. Epaphras had caught the spirit of Paul's exhortation in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to "pray without ceasing." Epaphras had caught the example of Paul, who often tells those to whom he is writing that he is always praying for them. For instance, in 1 Thessalonians 1:2, Paul writes, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers." Beginning in Philippians 1:3, Paul writes, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all" (Phil. 1:3-4).

What's so challenging about this description is that Epaphras isn't making this up about himself to make himself look good, as if he is some sort of mighty prayer warrior. Rather, it's the observation of another person making a judgment upon the prayer life of Epaphras. Paul commented about this man that he was "always" praying. Somehow, in some way, his commitment to pray was demonstrated in the life of Paul. I don't know exactly how Paul perceived this to be the case. Perhaps Epaphras was quick to suggest that they pray. Perhaps Paul noticed how the mind of Epaphras often seemed to be directed upon the Lord, as if he was enjoying constant communion with his heavenly Father. Perhaps when they prayed, it seemed as if the prayers of Epaphras were a mere continuation of prayers that he had often prayed before.

Not only was Epaphras devoting his time to prayer but he was also devoting his effort to prayer. Paul says that Epaphras was "always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers." In the Greek text, it reads that Epaphras was "agonizing" in his prayers. What a great picture of prayer this is! Prayer is work! Prayer is difficult! Prayer is tiresome! Prayer is agony! And should you ever spend a significant time in prayer, you know what I'm talking about. Prayer is hard work! Paul knew this. In Romans 15:30, he told the Roman believers, "Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me." Again, it's the same Greek word, "agonizing." Paul was calling the people of the church to strenuous work with hard labor in prayer.

Now, lest you think that prayer is like a hard day's work in the field or at the office, where you aren't enjoying yourself, you need to think again. Prayer is like hard work on the treadmill or on the basketball court, or in the weight-room. It's tiring and exhausting, but you can often enjoy the process. I play soccer on a team in the community. In fact, this past Friday night, I was on the soccer field. Was it tiring and hard and difficult and exhausting? Yes! In fact, sometimes I come off the field so exhausted and sucking wind so hard that I think it's best if my fellow teammates don't come within a four-foot radius of me, because I'm sucking all of the oxygen out of the air! But, why do I do it? Because I enjoy it. I love the process of playing. But, when done rightly, it's hard work that tires you out. The same with prayer. It might be exhausting and difficult and painful at times. But, it's communion with your heavenly Father, which makes it a joy ultimately.

The devotion that Epaphras shows to prayer is shown in his commitment of time: "always" praying. He shows it also in his effort: "laboring earnestly." Another characteristic of the praying of Epaphras is that he is spiritually minded. This can be seen in what he is actually praying for those in Colossae. His prayer is "that they may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God." His concern for them isn't primarily for their health. His concern for them isn't concerning their poverty, or their jobs or the education or their kids or their need for a new donkey, or for a good rain for their crops, as important as those things were for those in Colossae and worthy of prayer for our daily need. Rather, his heart was for their spiritual well-being. The goal of his prayer was that they might "stand perfect and fully assured." This is a great prayer. It's a pastoral prayer.

Back in Colossians 1:28, Paul summarized the method and the goal of his ministry. He said, "And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ." This is Biblical ministry: admonishing and teaching everyone, with the goal of presenting every man complete in Christ. The great end of all pastoral ministry is the day when those in the congregation are presented before Christ Jesus. The desire of a pastor is that those in the congregation would be presented perfect and complete and blameless on that day and not because of some standard of righteousness obtained by themselves. (That's not how you come to be complete in Christ). But rather, because of being in Christ (as Col. 2:10 says).

In the very next verse (i.e. Col. 1:29), Paul indicates of his intense labor toward these ends. He says, "For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me" (Col. 1:29). Here we see Paul "agonizing" in his work to present everyone complete in Christ. This is exactly what Epaphras was doing in prison with Paul. He couldn't be with them to agonize for them in their presence, but he was agonizing for them in the only way he could: in constant prayer.

It's no accident that Epaphras prays this way, with such a pastoral heart. He was, in fact, a pastor, who had a great concern for his people. In verse 13, we read, "For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis." These cities were about 10 miles west of Colossae, downstream of the river that flowed in the Lycus valley. Laodicea was a prominent city of great wealth. Hierapolis was resort town, which had some hot mineral springs where people could enjoy their hot-tubs. Being so close, Epaphras had probably brought the gospel not only to Colossae, but also these other cities. As a result, he had a great heart for these people, which is why he prayed as he did.

Do you want to pray for others like this? Develop a heart and a concern for them and you will pray for them. Why do you think it's so easy to pray for your children when they are in distress? Because you have a great heart for them. You have a great concern for them. Thus, it's easy to pray for them. As a pastor, it's no different. There are circumstances that have taken place in the lives of some of you, that I have a

difficulty getting off my mind. I find myself constantly praying for your particular needs. It might be a job and I'm praying for you. It might be a situation with your children and I'm praying for you. It might be something regarding your marriage and I'm praying for you. It might be something regarding your role in this church and I'm praying for you.

This was the heart of Epaphras. He "labored earnestly" in his prayers because of the burden that he had for his loved children in Colossae and Hierapolis and Laodicea. He wanted them to "stand perfect" (Col. 4:12). That is, he wanted them to fully embrace Jesus as their perfect righteousness. But, he also had another desire. It's mentioned in the last half of verse 12. His desire for those in Colossae was for them to be "fully assured in all the will of God" (Col. 4:12). This gets at the heart of the entire reason for Paul's writing of this epistle.

There were many in Colossae who were seeking to persuade those in the church that Christ alone wasn't enough. "To be fully complete, you need to add things to your Christian life" they were told. "You need to eat certain foods" (Col. 2:16). "You need to keep certain religious days as holy" (Col. 2:16). "You need to whip your body into submission" (Col. 2:18). "You need to worship the angels" (Col. 2:18). "You need to have a spiritual experience, with visions" (Col. 2:18). "You need to keep away from certain things that will defile you" (Col. 2:21). But, this entire letter shows that such isn't the case. You need Christ alone. Faith in Him is sufficient to justify. Faith in Him is sufficient to change you. The heart of Epaphras is that they would be "fully assured" in these things, that the false teachers might not persuade them away. It's a pastor's heart. It works itself out in his prayer life. It's the lesson that Epaphras teaches us: Pray for others (like Epaphras)

Let's continue on to verse 14, "Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings." The lesson we learn from Luke is ...

7. Serve with your skills (like Luke)

We know much about Luke. After all, he wrote the gospel that bears his name. He also wrote the book of Acts. When you total up all the words and all of the pages, you find something very interesting. His writings comprise more of the New Testament than do Paul's writings (if you assume that Paul didn't write Hebrews). Luke wrote 26% of the New Testament. Paul wrote 25% of the New Testament. It's amazing. We don't think of Luke in this way. But, it's true. Luke contributed more of the New Testament than Paul did.

However, as important as Luke is, his name is mentioned only three times in the Scripture. He is mentioned here in **Colossians 4:14**, being called, "the beloved physician." He is also mentioned in **Philemon, verse 24**, where he is sending his greetings, and as a "fellow worker." (In a little bit, we will see how Paul identifies this man as a "fellow worker.") The final place he is mentioned by name in the Bible is in **2 Timothy 4:11**, in which Paul writes, "Only Luke is with me."

Though these are the only places where he is mentioned by name, we also know that he was a frequent traveling companion of the apostle Paul. We know this because of how the book of Acts is written. Much of the book is written in the third person. But, there are times in the book, when Luke refers to the events in the first person, plural (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16). For instance, in Acts 16:10, he writes, "When Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." Luke was in the story! He was a traveling companion on Paul's second missionary journey, but didn't return home with them. You also find him meeting up with Paul again during the third missionary journey. Finally, he traveled with Paul to Rome.

When you look at the pronouns in Acts, it's difficult to know exactly where it was that Luke remained behind and where it was that he joined them on the journey. For instance, in Acts 20:3, 5, we read of how "[Paul] decided to return through Macedonia" with some men who "had gone on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas." Luke seemingly jumps on the scene without any reference as to when he joined up with Paul.

In seeking to track down his life, it's very difficult to know where he traveled. It's a bit like the scene in C. S. Lewis' book, "The Lion, Witch, and the Wardrobe." Perhaps you remember the scene when the four Pevensie children came to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Beaver. All four of them, Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy were all there, hearing about Aslan for the very first time. As things came out, Mr. Beaver was telling these children about Aslan and his power over the white witch:

When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death.
And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.

And then, Mr. Beaver told the children that they must meet Aslan tomorrow at the Stone Table. Following this, Mr. Beaver told the children of the four thrones at Cair Paravel. And then, suddenly, they realized that Edmund was missing! As the children and the beavers reconstructed the conversation, it was difficult to tell when it was exactly that Edmund had left them. When you go back and read the text of the story, you find Edmund simply leaving, but you can't quite figure it out.

So it is with Luke. One minute, you find him talking about "us" traveling. Soon, it's back to "them." Then, it returns once again to "we." Then, it turns back again to "them." The book ends with a "we" section of Scripture, as he was with Paul, traveling to Rome, where he now finds himself ministering to Paul in prison.

Regardless, the lesson I have pulled out of the life of Luke is simple: Serve with your skills.

Luke was a physician, who had some medical expertise. It may have been the case that Luke initially ministered to Paul as a physician. During his second missionary journey, Paul was traveling through the Galatian region (Acts 16:6). We know from the book of Galatians that he was experiencing some type of illness when he was traveling (Gal. 4:13). We don't know exactly what it was. Paul simply wrote to them, "You know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time" (Gal. 4:13). Later, he called it a "bodily condition" which may have been loathsome to people (Gal. 4:14). Perhaps it was some facial disfigurement. Some have thought that it was a problem with his eyes (Gal. 4:15). We don't know.

But, when you read through Acts, you find out that Luke joined the apostle somewhere around this time. It may well have been because Luke's profession could help Paul during his difficult missionary journeys. During the last days of his life, Luke was the only one at his side. Perhaps Luke used his medical skills to help Paul during these difficult days in a disease-laden prison.

But, these weren't the only skills that Luke utilized. I would suspect that he, as a physician, was a bright man with some researching abilities. I mentioned earlier how he had written Luke and Acts. He begins his gospel with these words, "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught." You get the picture here of a detail-oriented man who wanted to get all of the facts straight.

In terms of Luke's writing style, his writing is much more complex than all of the other gospel writers. Reading Luke in the Greek text is much more difficult than reading Matthew, Mark, or John, because it is more elegantly written. In fact, Acts 27 is one of the most difficult chapters to read because of all of the technical nautical terms contained in the chapter. The fact that he wrote a quarter of the New Testament is also a demonstration of him using his skills and abilities in ministry.

I would encourage each of you to do this as well. Whatever skills the Lord has given to you, use them for the purpose of ministry. Not only was this the example of Luke, but it was also the exhortation of Peter, "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 4:10-11).

This has taken place at Rock Valley Bible Church. I know of several physicians, who have used their medical skill to consult with those who were sick in this congregation. I know of a financial planner who has helped people with financial issues. I know of some handymen who have helped others with repairs on their homes. I know of some who have abilities in the kitchen to teach their skills to some young women of our congregation. I know of some men who know a thing or two about cars, who have helped others with their car problems. I know of those with musical ability helping others to sing or play their instrument better. I know of those with athletic skills helping children to learn their sport better. I know of those with computer skills who have helped those in the body with computer problems. I know of those who have writing skills being used to produce well-written literature that this church has used. I know of men with business skills helping other men in their business. And so, I would encourage each of you to use the skills and abilities and gifts that the Lord has given to you to serve others however you can. It is how the body works! Each part performing its proper function.

Let's move on to Demas. His lesson is clear.

8. Don't love this world (like Demas)

Demas occurs three times in the Scriptures. Curiously enough, his name occurs in the same context that Luke's name occurs. One instance is here in **Colossians 4:14**, where we simply read, "Demas." You can supply the implied, "Sends you his greetings" from the first half of verse 14, but there is a clear sense of being abrupt and short. Perhaps Paul sensed trouble with Demas.

Another reference to Demas comes in **Philemon, verse 24**, where Demas is sending his greetings to Philemon and is called, "a fellow worker." We don't know fully the extent of the meaning of this phrase, "fellow worker," but, somehow, in some way, he was working alongside Paul in the ministry, helping out wherever he was able. Perhaps this was in delivering letters, as Tychicus was doing. Perhaps this was in praying, as Epaphras had done. Perhaps this was in serving Paul physically, as Luke had done. We don't know anything about the type of work he did alongside Paul. But sadly, we do know that his labor was short lived.

In the last place where we find his name in the Bible, we read, "Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica" (**2 Tim. 4:10**). This is a sad verse. Paul had a fellow worker who abandoned him. In his hour of greatest need, Demas left Paul high and dry. The reason he gives is simple: He "loved this present world."

We don't have enough data to know how it is exactly that he loved this world. It may have been the lust of the flesh that drove him to leave Paul alone in prison (1 John 2:15). The prison conditions weren't the most sanitary. They were often cold and dark places. To be with Paul would have meant discomfort for his body -- cold, damp, and stinky. It may have been the lust of the eyes that caused him to desert Paul (1 John 2:15). There may have been some monetary losses that he experienced as a result of associating with Paul in prison. His eyes wanted more. Rather than being with Paul, Demas wanted a well-paying job that would allow his eyes to be satisfied with possessions. It may have been the boastful pride of life that caused him to desert Paul (1 John 2:15). He simply couldn't bring himself to associate with a man in prison. Earlier in 2 Timothy, Paul warned Timothy, "Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner" (2 Tim. 1:8). And so, this was a real danger. Perhaps it was the case with Demas. It may have been that he was just plain scared for his life. Paul may be describing the fact that he wanted to live, rather than go to the death for Christ. We simply don't know the details behind Paul's description of Demas that he "loved this present world."

John Bunyan had an opinion. In his great allegory, *Pilgrim's Progress*, he had a character named, "Demas." Christian and Hopeful met him standing (gentleman-like) beside the Silver-Mine. He urged them to come in, saying, "Here is a Silver-Mine, and some digging in it for Treasure; if you will come, with a little pains, you may richly provide for yourselves." When Christian and Hopeful refused to go into the mine, Demas called again to them, "But will you not come over and see." Christian then rebuked him, calling him "an Enemy to the right ways of the Lord of this Way." And yet, still, Demas cried out again that he was one of their fraternity. Finally, Christian said, "I know you; Gehazi was your great grand-father, and Judas your father, and you have trod their steps." John Bunyan surmised that Demas left Paul out of greed, wanting to enjoy the passing pleasures that money can buy.

Regardless of the exact circumstances behind Demas loving the world, the admonition clearly comes to us. Don't love this world (like Demas)

And the implication is clear. 1 John 2:15, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in Him." You cannot love God and love this world also. You cannot love God and this world at the same time. The antidote to help keep your life from such attractions is to realize how transient this world is. "The world is passing away, and also its lusts" (1 John 2:15). Let's move onto our next lesson. ...

9. Serve with your resources (like Nympha)

Consider verse 15, "Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house." This is the only verse in all the Bible where Nympha's name is mentioned. And if you have the King James Version (or the New King James), your Bible reads, "Nymphas, and the church that is in his house." The difference comes about because some manuscripts read the woman's name, "Nympha" and other manuscripts read a man's name, "Nymphas." There is no sense in arguing one way or another this morning, because the point is still the same. The point is that Paul was greeting Nymphas (or Nympha) who hosted a church in his or (her) home.

It's difficult to know exactly where this house was. It may have been in Laodicea, but there appears to be a distinction between the church in this house and the church in Laodicea. This house may have been in Hierapolis, a few miles away. Perhaps this house hosted a home Bible study, akin to our "Flocks" ministry. We don't know anything other than this. But we do know that this home hosted many people on a frequent basis.

Churches meeting in homes was a common practice in the early church. In Acts 12:12, we read that "many were gathered together" in John Mark's mother's home. Aquila and Priscilla hosted churches in their various homes. When they were living in Ephesus, the church met in their home (1 Cor. 16:19). When they were living in Rome, the church met in their home as well (Romans 16:3-5). Philemon hosted the church in Colossae in his home (Philemon 2). It wasn't until the third century that any buildings began to be built as specific locations for churches to meet.

The usage of these homes to meet in all depended upon the size of the home as well as the size of the church. Some homes were large and could accommodate a crowd of people (Mark 2:2). Other homes were small and could accommodate only a handful of people. I'm sure the church was transient in those early days. As the church grew, they needed larger places to gather. Perhaps the church was forced to meet in several locations. There are many questions about the specifics here. But, I believe that we have a good point of application: Serve with your resources (like Nympha).

Nympha had a house that was big enough for the church to use, and so she offered the use of it to the church. I know that this isn't always the most convenient thing. When you have a large number of people in your home, it's never easy. Carpets get muddy. Floors get scratched. Food gets spilled. Walls get bumped. Furniture gets abused. Doorknobs break. Toilets get clogged (or broken). Bathrooms are dirtied. Closets get inspected.

I love the perspective of one of the families in our church who hosts a bi-weekly home Bible study. On a number of occasions, I have seen accidents take place at his home during Flock (toys broken or juice spilled on his carpet). He has always been quick to say, "Flock casualty." I appreciate the heart that is willing to serve others in these ways. He knows of the difficulties that hosting people has. He was ready and willing to pay the price.

You can incur some expenses as well. You might need to purchase some extra food. Your heating or cooling needs may arise. Or, you may need to fix broken things. It takes time and effort, and you may need to get your house ready for the guests that come over by vacuuming, cleaning, or picking up, or to spend a good deal of time when everyone leaves cleaning up your house. There are difficulties in opening your house on a frequent basis, but if you have a heart to "use your resources," such difficulties are quickly overlooked.

But, now with this point of application, I want to expand a bit beyond houses to anything that God has given you to use. An example might be if you have an extra car and somebody needs to borrow a car for some reason or another, "use your resources" for ministry purposes. Realize that bad things might happen. Several months ago, some out of state relatives of a member at Rock Valley Bible Church came for a visit. It was entirely our pleasure to loan them our minivan for the week they were out here. On Friday night, they visited Chicago. They chose to take our car, rather than the smaller one owned by the member of our congregation.

On the expressway, they were hit from behind by a drunk driver and damaged our car bumper and rear door. As I remember, it was about 10:30 at night and I received a call, ? I got in an accident. ... Is there anything I should know?" And so, I talked with him about our insurance cards that were in the glove compartment. I told him to call the police and have them write up a report. He called back later to update me with everything. He was thinking of how much safer it was for them to be driving a larger car, rather than his own smaller one, he told me on the phone, "I sure am glad that I was driving your car and not mine." (It's one of those humorous statements that I don't think that I'll ever forget). I know his heart and what he meant. It's still funny.

This is the type of thing that happens when you "use your resources" for ministry. A few years ago, we loaned our car to a friend, who took a trip to Chicago and came back with a dent in the fender. The one borrowing the car was at a restaurant with valet parking and the car was returned with this dent, with no information about who hit the car. If you hold your things in your hand lightly, these things will be OK. So I drove around for the next several years with a dent in our back bumper. It really wasn't that big of a deal.

In the case of our minivan, things turned out for the better. We had a few scratches on our back hatch, but they never warranted fixing. But, due to this accident, there was a bit more damage done to the back hatch. The repair to the accident called for repainting the back hatch. Our car came back from the repair shop looking better than ever! The drunk driver's insurance took care of everything, so we didn't pay a cent for our new paint job. Our car looks great today.

So, I encourage you to use the resources that God has given you to serve others. If you have a big house, have people over. If you have an extra car, loan it out to those in need. If you have a chainsaw, lend it out when a tree needs cutting. If you have a roto-tiller, let others use it for their gardens in the spring. If your children grow out of their bicycles, give them to a younger family. If you no longer need some furniture

in your home, give it away. Realize that God owns everything. You are merely the steward of the resources that he gives to you. To “use your resources” means that others will put wear-and-tear on them. But, a right perspective can help you through the difficulties.

Randy Alcorn said it well, “Many years ago, I loaned a new portable stereo to our church’s high school group. It came back beat-up and, I admit, it bothered me. But the Lord convicted me, reminding me it wasn’t my stereo—it was His. And it had been used to help reach young people. Who was I to complain about what was God’s?” [2]

Nympha had similar struggles as her house was used for this church. I believe that Paul knew of the difficulties that she would face. It’s why he took special care to note that the church met in her house. It was his way of honoring this devoted servant of the Lord. So, serve with your resources (like Nympha). Let’s look at our last point this morning.

10. Fulfill your ministry (like Archippus)

This lesson comes from verse 17, “Say to Archippus, ‘Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.’” This man appears in the Scripture two times. Once here in **Colossians 4:14**, and once in **Philemon, verse 2**, where he is simply identified as “our fellow soldier.” That’s all that we know about this man. So, once again, we are placed in a difficult place in seeking to understand the details about him.

Being a “fellow soldier” of Paul’s, certainly refers to his passion to fight hard for the gospel of Christ. This means not fighting with loud crashing swords but with deeds of love and mercy, seeking to bring the heavenly kingdom to earth.

Now, we have no idea what sort of ministry he had received from the Lord. Perhaps he was pastoring the church in place of Epaphras. Perhaps he was a missionary, waiting to be sent out by the church in Colossae. Perhaps he was ministering among the poor in Colossae. We don’t know. Paul’s only admonition to him was to “fulfill it.” In other words, “Finish it.” “Complete it.” “Bring it to an end.” “Do your work heartily as unto the Lord.” In our last few moments this morning, I simply turn this admonition around to you. “Fulfill your ministry.”

If the Lord has given you a ministry to do, do it with all your might. “Go, labor on, spend and be spent.” “Give your all.” “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last.”

And now, a final comment on verse 18, “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.” At this point, Paul took the pen from his secretary and closes this letter in his customary way, by writing his own, personal greeting to the people. This helped to demonstrate the authenticity of this letter, like a signature at the bottom of a contract.

He closes with the most important thing for himself and the most important thing for those in Colossae. The most important thing for himself is that others would remember his imprisonment. This probably means that they should pray often for him. The most important thing for those in Colossae is that God’s grace would be with them. Apart from the grace of God, we are sunk. Oh, may His grace come to us in full measure to see these things accomplished in our lives.

May we pray for each other like Epaphras. May we serve with our skills like Luke. May we not love this world like Demas. May we serve with our resources like Nympha and may we fulfill our ministries like Archippus.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 14, 2007 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] Though it looks like our exposition of Colossians is finished, there is one verse that I skipped in my message this morning. You could easily turn the reading (or listening) of this message into a puzzle: which verse did I skip? The answer will come in two weeks when I preach a final message in Colossians upon this skipped verse. Also, in my message, I have highlighted in bold text every occurrence of these people in the Bible (as I did in last’s week’s message write-up as well).

[2] Randy Alcorn, Treasure Principle, p. 22.